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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SKOPJE 000250

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TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR NATO MK

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: PM GRUEVSKI AFTER THE NATO SUMMIT

REF: SKOPJE 239

Classified By: POLOFF BOSWORTH FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

Summary

¶1. (SBU) In an April 4 meeting with PM Gruevski in the aftermath of Greece's veto of Macedonia's NATO membership bid at Bucharest, the Ambassador urged the PM to re-engage in the Nimetz process to resolve the name issue as soon as possible. Gruevski said he was willing to re-engage with Nimetz soon, but doubted Greece would be any more flexible on the matter in the near-term. He was pleased with USG agreement to pursue enhanced bilateral ties to address public concerns about Macedonia's security in the wake of the Greek veto, and said his party is still weighing whether to call for early elections. End Summary.

Appreciation for USG Support

¶2. (C) During an April 4 meeting with the Ambassador, PM Gruevski thanked the USG for its strong support for Macedonia's NATO membership bid at the Bucharest Summit, despite Greece's unyielding insistence on vetoing membership for Macedonia absent an agreement on the name. He said that apart from a failed attempt by German Chancellor Merkel and a similar Romanian gambit to persuade the GOM to accept the Greek name formulation -- Republic of Skopje (Macedonia) -- it had been gratifying to see most of the NATO allies concentrating efforts on persuading Greece not to veto.

Skeptical About Greek Flexibility Post-Bucharest

¶3. (C) Gruevski said he was pleased that U.S. leaders, during a U.S.-Macedonia bilateral meeting with Gruevski and President Crvenkovski, had made it clear that Macedonia had met NATO membership criteria, and that Macedonia would receive an invitation once the name issue with Greece was resolved. He added that the Slovenians had told him that Greek FM Bakoyannis had suggested that Greece had to veto due to public pressure, but that Athens could be more flexible on the name issue in the months following the Bucharest Summit. Gruevski hoped this would be the case, but was concerned that the Greeks might be even more rigid in their demands for a name change and scope of use in the wake of their self-described "victory" at Bucharest.

Will Remain Engaged in Name Talks, Timing Is Doubtful

¶4. (C) The Ambassador urged Gruevski to resume contact with Ambassador Nimetz and to restart the name negotiations as soon as possible. The PM replied that the GOM is prepared to resume contact with Nimetz as soon as next week, but he thought it would be some time before the Greek side was ready to re-engage. He also expressed concern that Macedonia's negotiating position was weaker now than it had been before Bucharest. Under the circumstances, Gruevski doubted that name negotiations could be completed in a few months, suggesting the process might take as long as two years or more.

Addressing the Public's Fears

¶5. (C) Gruevski said he was satisfied with the agreement reached with U.S. officials in Bucharest to engage in a dialogue to strengthen bilateral ties. That would help address public concerns related to Macedonia's future security. Closer defense and other bilateral ties would go far to reassure the public. They also would help the GOM make a strong case for continued troop deployments to such NATO missions as ISAF in Afghanistan.

¶6. (C) The Ambassador suggested taking a broad view of security in this dialogue. She stressed that there would be no "bi-lateral mutual defense treaty," as Macedonian media have reported. Rather, the agreement could enhance the U.S.-Macedonian relationship on several levels, including economic development and rule of law, for example. Gruevski said he expected FM Milososki to travel to Washington in the next week or two to continue those discussions with the Secretary and other USG officials.

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Decision Soon on Early Elections

¶7. (C) Gruevski indicated his VMRO party had not yet decided whether to call for early elections. He noted that continued reforms and progress toward Euro-Atlantic integration remain the GOM's top concerns, and balancing this progress with the timing of any potential elections was a focus of intra-party discussions. He expected VMRO leadership would take a decision on the issue soon; he noted that if the party did not call for early elections within the next month, then it would be unlikely to do so this year. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of free and fair elections, with no intimidation or fraud. Gruevski fully concurred. He assured the Ambassador that he would let us know as soon as a decision was reached.

Comment

¶8. (C) Gruevski was moderate and restrained in his comments about the Greek veto. He used no isolationist, nationalist rhetoric. We are encouraged by his focus on continuing reform progress and by his willingness to continue engagement on the name issue. At the same time, it is clear that he sees little hope for a near-term solution to the name dispute, absent a dramatic shift in the Greek position. Should VMRO decide on early elections, that will further complicate the picture for the talks. Political partisanship in the pre-electoral campaign period could get in the way; on the other hand, having a NATO invitation could be an asset on election day. End comment.

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